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INQUIRY

Topic: USA'S SECURITY

Donald T. Regan, 67, joined the Reagan administration in 1981 as Treasury secretary. He switched jobs with James Baker in 1985 to become White House chief of staff. Regan, known for his loyalty to the president, was interviewed for USA TODAY by free-lancer Lee Michael Katz.



Donald Regan

Prosecute leakers; defeat terrorism

USA TODAY: Do you think we've made any strides against terrorism?

REGAN: We're still very much concerned about terrorism, and we're not waiting for it to happen. We're going out to seek those who would perpetrate terrorist acts and try to prevent them from doing that. We've had a lot of successes in apprehending people trying this. In Turkey recently, we captured people with hand grenades and other explosives, who were approaching a U.S. officers' club with the intention of bombing it. We've stopped many things of that nature. The vigilance at our airports has been stepped up tremendously.

USA TODAY: Do you fear terrorists will strike at the upcoming Statue of Liberty festivities?

REGAN: We are taking elaborate security precautions for that particular festival. Police departments, not only in New York City but in surrounding communities; state police; and federal agencies have all been involved. We're not guarding just against Libyans, we're guarding against any terrorist, domestic or foreign.

USA TODAY: Do you expect something to happen?

REGAN: No, we're guarding against the possibility of it's happening.

USA TODAY: Will there be more terrorism in the USA?

REGAN: I don't believe so. There may be domestic personalities, people associated with foreign terrorists, who might try acts of that nature, but I don't know many groups now who literally want to bomb government buildings.

USA TODAY: Should the media be prosecuted for reporting classified information? Have the media revealed any important U.S. intelligence secrets?

REGAN: This is a complicated question. Not only by tradition, but also by law, we have freedom of the press. We also know that publishing top-secret material, partic-

ularly anything that endangers human life, is dangerous and really subversive. It's against our government.

USA TODAY: Should they be punished?

REGAN: Now, what I'm coming to is this: The leaker of this information, if it is highly classified information, should be prosecuted. If we have knowledge that the media are going to report such things, if we find out they're going to report it, we try to contact them and explain what they're going to do to national security by reporting that material. Usually, the media cooperate with us, and we're very grateful for that. They are responsible.

USA TODAY: Recently some newspapers and networks have run reports that angered the administration. Do you see them — NBC News, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* — as subversive?

REGAN: No, I don't.

USA TODAY: Didn't you say that revealing some of this information was subversive?

REGAN: I said that the leaking of this information was subversive. Not the publication. The publication of it depends upon whether or not they know the results of their acts, they know that in so doing they might cause harm to American lives, and American interests, and then persist in doing it. I think that's something that should be referred to the attorney general.

USA TODAY: NBC News recently interviewed Abu Abbas, the accused mastermind of the Achille Lauro hijacking. Was the network right to do that?

REGAN: I don't approve — and I'm speaking for myself here, not necessarily for the administration — of anyone giving time on U.S. airwaves to people who try to overthrow or destroy this government. When a network gives this person publicity — a person who ordered the execution of a U.S. citizen, a defenseless, elderly gentleman — that is reprehensible. I think the same thing when a network puts on a propagandist for the Soviet government, and gives him time to criticize the president's speech without labeling that for what it is, propaganda.

USA TODAY: ABC allowed Vladimir Pozner to rebut the president's State of the Union speech. Are you saying ABC is a shill for the Soviet point of view?

REGAN: I don't think they are shills for it, I think he's a shill for it, and I think he should be labeled as such. I think that they ought to insist, as a prerequisite for getting Pozner on their network, that we be allowed to send somebody over to appear on Soviet TV.

USA TODAY: What can our government do to keep South Africa from blowing up?

REGAN: Do what we are doing. Express displeasure with the government in this attitude of cracking down, try to work with elements within the government who are trying to find a peaceful solution, try to work with the black leaders. This is not an easy situation, and the worst thing, I think, would be for us to turn our backs on South Africa, pull out, and leave it to its own devices.

USA TODAY: Would you consider asking South African President Botha to step down as Ferdinand Marcos did?

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REGAN: We would never do that. President Marcos stepped down on his own. We didn't ask him to step down.

USA TODAY: Bishop Tutu is saying that only intervention by the outside world will prevent Armageddon. Do you think that's true?

REGAN: It depends upon what type of intervention he means. If he means what we're trying to do, to talk, yes. If he means physical intervention, wherein we'd send in troops, I don't believe in that, no.

USA TODAY: So the administration still supports the South African government?

REGAN: No, we don't support the South African government; we're trying to work with elements within the South African government to try to reconcile the opposing black and white views.

USA TODAY: Is the SALT II treaty definitely gone?

REGAN: No, it's not gone. It never was. It never existed. There never was a ratified treaty, and even if it had been ratified, it would have expired by this time.

USA TODAY: So the USA is definitely not going to continue to live up to SALT II?

REGAN: The United States is still technically in agreement with the terms of that SALT II treaty. So we are not, as some would have it, in violation of any treaty. I think that what we should try to do is to work out a better arrangement, in which we actually reduce the number of nuclear forces. All that treaty did was to slow down the rate of growth. It did not in any way secure a reduction in armaments. All of our initiatives that we have had in Geneva, the ones that we've tailored over the last 12 months, all call for reductions in numbers of armaments.

USA TODAY: Is there a realistic chance for a summit between President Reagan and Soviet leader Gorbachev later this year?

REGAN: Yes. After all, this is only the middle of June. Now the best time would be after the election period here in the United States.

USA TODAY: Do you think that the Supreme Court will change its position and outlaw abortions?

REGAN: We noticed that Chief Justice Burger recently changed his position from the original case, *Roe vs. Wade*. The Chief Justice said in his dissent that he thought it was time that we looked at that whole subject again. I think that he's probably right.

USA TODAY: The president recently said that if people are hungry, it's because they don't know how to get help. If people are hungry, do you think it's their own fault?

REGAN: No, it's not their own fault. This United States government is providing 93 million meals per day. And, if we're producing that much per day, certainly we could produce additional meals for any of the others who are hungry. Charitable organizations, the Salvation Army, many others, are providing food daily for thousands.

USA TODAY: So the hungry are misinformed?

REGAN: Not misinformed. You keep trying to put that word in my mouth. It's that they simply have not been able to be located, or they themselves haven't been able to locate where all these meals are being given out.

USA TODAY: So you don't think the hungry or the homeless issue should be a priority?

REGAN: Certainly. But it's more than just feeding them, it's finding out why they're homeless. Are they employable? Is there some way to put them into gainful work? That's the ultimate solution. Or if it's a psychiatric problem, to get them medical help, so that they can be taken care of by competent psychiatrists.

USA TODAY: You went from being a top corporate executive on Wall Street to working intimately with the president of the United States. What's the difference between government and corporate life?

REGAN: There are many differences. In government life, you operate almost in a goldfish bowl. Everything that you say, you have to be careful the way you say it, you have to be careful not to leave the wrong impression, not to answer a question incorrectly. You have to be very much alert to the politics of everything you do, and you can rarely make individual decisions. In the corporate world, individual decisions can be made.

USA TODAY: What's your biggest priority in the future? Do you see any one issue as the most important?

REGAN: I would say disarmament. In the foreign field, that's No. 1. And No. 2, to really get this economy going, keep it going here in the United States.